

Milwaukee County Mental Health Board Hosts Community Conversation About Mental Health Services

Residents share experiences, priorities and feedback for 2018 Budget

(Milwaukee, WI) May 12, 2017 - Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele, the Milwaukee County Mental Health Board and Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division collaborated to host a community conversation about mental health services on Thursday, May 4. The conversation aimed to gather feedback from the participants about their experiences with and opinions about mental health services in Milwaukee County.

Nearly 70 Milwaukee County residents, people with lived experience, and representatives of non-profit organizations, city health departments, coalitions and more attended the Community Conversation on Mental Health Services, facilitated by the Zeidler Center for Public Discussion (www.zeidlercenter.org). The Milwaukee County Mental Health Board intends to use the insights gathered during the event and an open online survey to shape its 2018 budget and programs.

The County has already seen success with this more interactive model of civic engagement and public input. Last year, as part of his budget process, County Executive Abele partnered with the Zeidler Center to host feedback circles where residents learned about the County's budget and were able to give meaningful input on specific issues and policy suggestions.

"I feel strongly that the community should be heard as we make important decisions about where and how to invest our resources into programs and services that empower more people," County Executive Abele said. "The input we received last year through the listening circles facilitated by the Zeidler Center was an important part of the budget process. It's great to see BHD and the Mental Health Board continuing their strong commitment to community engagement as well."

"Coordinating the development of our 2018 budget with committed individuals and community organizations will help create and customize BHD's services and facilities in unity with our community's input and feedback," said Mike Lappen, Administrator for the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division. "When we understand the community's priorities, we are able to provide the person-centered behavioral health services that can help them and improve their lives."

Following introductory remarks by Mike Lappen, BHD Administrator, and Randy Oleszak, BHD Fiscal Administrator, participants at the event were divided into small groups led by professional facilitators from the Zeidler Center. Questions included: "What barriers, if any have you heard about or experienced?" "How could accessibility to services be improved?" "What gaps do you see in services?" The facilitators ensured everyone had an opportunity to share their experiences and opinions.

"The Zeidler Center's mission is to foster dialogue and invite trust in the midst of differences. We believe that feeling heard across boundaries through structured dialogue is essential to identify sustainable solutions. Our team was excited to be able to support these discussions on mental health service needs and help participants find common solutions for our community," said Dr. Katherine Wilson, Executive Director of the Zeidler Center.

Feedback already received through online survey forms and at BHD's budget hearings include: budget increase and inclusion requests for the Go Pass, peer run respite, a Mental Health Board research analyst, additional CART teams, suggestions to provide early intervention prior to needing WRAP services, and suggestions to divert people with mental illness from the corrections system.

For those who were unable to attend the community conversation, feedback can be given online or at the next public comment budget hearing. Individuals can visit Milwaukee.gov/2018 budget to learn more.

The Community Conversation on mental health services in Milwaukee County took place as part of month-long campaign designed to foster conversations about mental health care, reducing stigma and breaking down barriers for individuals to seek support. The campaign is being implemented as part of Mental Health Awareness Month, which takes place every year in May. BHD has developed a dedicated website and toolkit including flyers, conversation starters, a video and more to support members of the community to get active during Mental Health Awareness Month. To learn more, visit Milwaukee.gov/myMHconvo.

About the Milwaukee County Mental Health Board

The Milwaukee County Mental Health Board (MHB) was established in 2014 through Wisconsin Act 203. The board is made up of 13 members and includes mental health professionals, consumers and advocates. The MHB is responsible for setting policy for the Behavioral Health Division.

About the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division

The Behavioral Health Division provides care and treatment to adults, children, and adolescents with mental illness, substance use disorders, and intellectual disabilities through both County-operated programs and contracts with community agencies. Services include intensive short-term treatment through our crisis services and inpatient services, as well as a full array of supportive community services for persons with serious mental illness and substance use disorders.

About the Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services

The mission of the Milwaukee County Department of Health & Human Services is to enhance the quality of life for individuals who need support living healthy, independent, and safe lives within our community. Our vision is to be recognized as the public model of excellence, leadership, and partnership in human services driving superior outcomes for our community.

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